



By Presidential Proclamation, the first of May each year is set aside to encourage Americans to recognize and appreciate the importance of the rule of law in this country. This year's Law Day Yosemite celebration, May 1, 2015, will focus on the 800th anniversary of the **Magna Carta**, a landmark document in British law that is the source of the guarantees of "due process of law" found in the United States Constitution. King John sealed the agreement in 1215 under intense pressure to remedy disputes over the King's treatment of the nobles and their property.

Over the next several centuries the "Great Charter" had an on-off history in England. By the 1600's the most influential British legal writer, Edward Coke, used Magna Carta to support the idea that the government could not take away a person's liberty or property without "due process of law."

In the days of rebellion against the British crown, the American colonists argued that King George III was violating their fundamental rights and cited Magna Carta as a source of those rights. On the right is the colonial seal of Massachusetts, from 1775, which reflects the reverence the colonists held for the Charter as a source of rights (the colonist holds a copy of Magna Carta in his left hand):



The American Constitution's Fifth Amendment guarantees that the federal government cannot deprive a person of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law." In 1866 the same phrase was included in the Fourteenth Amendment, which applies to the state and local governments. The United States Supreme Court, empowered to provide definitive meanings of the Constitution's language, has interpreted the phrase "due process" to be both a source of essential procedural safeguards in criminal and civil court proceedings, but also as a source of other fundamental rights such as the right of privacy. Magna Carta thus has a lasting legacy and direct impact on all people in this country.

LAW DAY YOSEMITE 2015 ESSAY CONTEST



This year Yosemite Law Day will again sponsor an essay contest open to 8th grade students at El Portal, Groveland, Lee Vining, Mariposa, Lake Don Pedro, Wasuma, Wawona, Woodland, and Yosemite Elementary Schools and Oak Creek Intermediate School.

PROMPT: In a well-developed, multi-paragraph essay of no more than 600 words, address the following question:

If you could set up your own government under our Constitution, how would you define “due process of law” and what protections would it include, and why?

RULES: Submissions must be typed, double-spaced and between 300 and 600 words in length. *The student’s name, 8th grade teacher and school shall be neatly printed on a separate sheet of paper stapled to the back of the essay, but not elsewhere. (Students are invited to put a made up five digit code on each page for identification in case pages separate.)* All essays must be delivered to the participant’s 8th grade teacher by **noon on Monday, March 23, 2015.**

Plagiarism: If the reviewers find evidence that material has been substantially copied from another source and not credited by citing the author, title, and location of the source material, the committee may disqualify the essay from the contest. While researching is allowed and in fact encouraged, express your ideas in your own words, not those of others!

Judging Criteria: Essays will be judged for understanding of the subject, originality of thought, argumentation, organization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Participating 8th grade teachers shall score their students’ essays in accordance with the above criteria and, no later than **April 8, 2015**, forward the top three choices to mseng@caed.uscourts.gov or M. J. Seng, P.O. Box 575, Yosemite, CA 95389. Three qualified, independent judges chosen by Judge Seng will evaluate the entries from each class and pick three finalists for awards and prizes.

Awards: The top three essay writers will be announced, introduced, applauded and rewarded during the Law Day Yosemite 2015 celebration in Yosemite National Park on May 1, 2015. Prizes last year included an Apple iPad and an Apple iPod.

Questions: Questions regarding the essay contest should be directed to Carol Moses at (559) 449-9069 or carol@yosemitelawyer.com or to Judge Seng at one of the above addresses.